Seeing Allah

By:
Dr. Vahid J. Majd

1 Introduction

The issue of seeing the Essence (Dhat) of Allah has historically been one of the theological differences between the Shia and the Sunni schools of thought. This has been due to their diverse understanding of the Essence of Allah as well as their differences in the interpretation of the verses of Quran. In this article, we will discuss the position of each school, and will examine each school's evidence in this regard. We will consider whether Allah can be seen by eyes or imagined or thought of by mind, and whether we have any way into the Essence of Allah. We will also discuss whether Allah can be seen by heart and felt by conscience. We will finally provide an in-depth interpretation of visiting Allah according to Quran and Hadith.

2 The Sunni View of Seeing Allah

One of the doctrines that the Sunnis unanimously uphold is that a human being can see the Essence of Allah by his or her own eyes. Some of their prominent scholars, including Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, maintained that Allah can be seen in this world as well as in the hereafter. Other Sunni scholars stated that He can only be seen in the hereafter. The Sunni scholars use the following verse of Quran as their proof:

"Some faces on that day (i.e., the Day of Judgment) will be radiant, looking towards their Lord. (75:22-23)"

Moreover, the Sunnis have narrated various traditions from their authorities to support this view. Here are some examples from their most authentic references:

Jarir bin 'Abdullah narrated:

The Prophet said, "You will definitely see your Lord with your own eyes."

- Sahih Bukhari, v9, Hadith #530

Jarir bin 'Abdullah narrated:

Allah's Apostle came out to us on the night of the full moon and said, "You will see your Lord on the Day of Resurrection as you see this (full moon) and you will have no difficulty in seeing Him."

- Sahih Bukhari, v9, Hadith #531

Notice the similarity that these traditions imply between seeing Allah and seeing other things (i.e., His creations) by one's eye. This is the case for the following traditions as well.

'Ata' bin Yazid Al-Laithi narrated:

On the authority of Abu Huraira: The people said, "O Allah's Apostle! Shall we see our Lord on the Day of Resurrection?" The Prophet said, "Do you have any difficulty in seeing the moon on a full moon night?" They said, "No, O Allah's Apostle." He said, "Do you have any difficulty in seeing the sun when there are no clouds?" They said, "No, O Allah's Apostle." He said, "So you will see Him like that. Allah will gather all the people on the Day of Resurrection, and ... Allah will come to them and say, 'I am your Lord.' They will (deny Him and) say, 'We will stay here till our Lord comes, for when our Lord comes, we will recognize Him.' So Allah will come to them in His appearance which they know, and will say, 'I am your Lord.' They will say, 'You are our Lord,' so they will follow Him. Then a bridge will be laid across Hell (Fire).... The man will say, 'O my Lord! Do not make me the most miserable of Your creation,' and he will keep on invoking Allah till Allah will laugh because of his sayings, and when Allah will laugh because of him, He will say to him, 'Enter Paradise,'....

- Sahih Bukhari, v9, Hadith #532a

Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri narrated:

... Allah's Apostle said, "So you will have no difficulty in seeing your Lord on that Day as you have no difficulty in seeing the sun and the moon (in a clear sky)." ... Then the Almighty will come to them in a shape other than the one which they saw the first time, and He will say, 'I am your Lord,'

and they will say, 'You are not our Lord.' And none will speak: to Him then but the Prophets, and then it will be said to them, 'Do you know any sign by which you can recognize Him?' They will say. 'The Shin,' and so Allah will then uncover His Shin whereupon every believer will prostrate before Him.
- Sahih Bukhari, v9, Hadith #532s
Those like Ahmad Ibn Hanbal who claimed Allah can be seen in this world and in dream based their argument on other traditions such as:
The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: "I saw my Lord in the shape of a young man who had abundant/long hairs."
- Kanz al-Ummal, v1, Ch3 of supplements to the Book of Iman, Hadith #1152
- Tabarani in Sunna said Abu Zar'a said this Hadith is Sahih. Suyuti said: This refers to seeing in dream.
Interestingly, it is mentioned in Sahih al-Bukhari on the authority of Abu Huraira that:
The Prophet said, "Allah created Adam in His picture, sixty cubits (about 30 meters) in height."
- Sahih Bukhari, v8, Hadith #246
If God has a shape similar to Adam (AS), it follows that He could surely be seen. As an indication of this possibility, we find in another Hadith:
The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: "I saw my Lord in the shape of a young hairy man in a green area while He was wearing gold shoes."
- Kanz al-Ummal, v1, Ch3 of supplements to the Book of Iman, Hadith #1153
- Majma' al-Zawa'id, v7, Book of Dream interpretation, Hadith #11745
- Mu'jam al-Kabir, al-Tabarani, Bab al-Baa, Hadith #25/144

3 The Shia Position
The Shia, on the other hand, believe that not only is Allah imperceptible by the eyes, but also that His Essence (Dhat) cannot be imagined, thought, or described. Any imagination or perception of the Essence of Allah is a creation of our mind, and the Creator is far removed from such a perception. Thus, we have no way to comprehend His Essence. We only understand by reason that His Essence should be purified from two limits: non-existence and likeness. Due to His abundant signs, we know that He is not non-existent, and at the same time, we know that He has no similarity whatsoever with any type of existence that we know and comprehend. This implies that the Essence of Allah cannot be seen. Any thing that is limited to our faculty of sight is a created being and any created being needs a creator. Thus, if one could see his Lord by his eyes, then his eyes have made Him a created being like other beings. He who likens Him to His creatures has indeed taken associates with Allah.
Allah cannot be seen by eyes anywhere because He does not have any body and does not occupy any place, as He is the creator of body and place. He is exalted beyond the limitations of His own creations and is far removed from being enclosed in them. We may only see the manifestations of Allah, which are but His created signs. We can never, however, see His Essence.
Now, let us probe into the verse that is used by the Sunnis as proof of seeing the Essence of Allah:
"Some faces on that day (i.e., the Day of Judgment) will be radiant, looking towards their Lord. (75:22-23)"
According to Arabic lexicon, the word "Nadhira" that is used in the above verse does not necessarily imply "seeing". The Imams (AS) have used other verses of Quran to support the definition of the word "Nadhira" in this verse as similar to the meaning of "Muntadhira", which means expecting, waiting, or looking forward to. On the commentary of this verse, Imam Ali (AS) said:
"... The verse means looking forward to what Allah, the Mighty and the Majestic, has promised them. And the word 'Nadhira' sometimes means 'expecting/waiting/looking forward' ('al-Muntadhira'). Haven't you heard the saying of Allah: '(But I am going to send him a present) and I am looking forward (Nadhira) to what (answer) the ambassadors will return (27:35).' This means I am waiting (al-Muntadhira) for what the ambassadors will return. As for the verse: 'For indeed he saw him at a second descent. Near the Lote-tree of the uttermost boundary (53:13-14)', it means

when Muhammad (S.A.W.) was near the Lote-tree of the uttermost boundary which none of His creations has passed it (saw Gabriel). It is His saying in the followed verses: '(His) sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong! For truly did he see one of the great signs of his Lord! (53:17-18)', he saw Gabriel in his shape twice. Verily Gabriel is a great creature and is from amongst the spiritual entities whose creation and shapes are not fully understood except by the Lord of the Universe."
- al-Ihtijaj, v1, p243
- Bihar al-Anwar, v90/93, p101, Hadith #1
In Arabic, often it is said: "Nadhartu Ilal-Hilal Falam Arahu" which means, "I looked towards the new moon (crescent) but I did not see it." Therefore, even according to the general Arabic usage of the term, the verse does not necessarily imply that they will see Allah.
In another Hadith on the commentary of the verse "Some faces on that day will be brilliant, looking towards their Lord", Imam Ali Ibn Musa al-Reza (AS) said:
"It means (their faces) are radiant and they are looking forward to the reward of their Lord."
- al-Ihtijaj, v2, p409
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p116, Hadith #19
- al-Amali, Shaikh Saduq, p409, Hadith #1
- al-Bihar, v4, p28, Hadith #3
Moreover, on the impermissibility of seeing the Essence of Allah, Quran states:
"Visions can not reach Him while He reaches to all visions. (6:103)"
The word "visions" is not limited to solely seeing by eyes. It covers all types of vision and perception as it is used in a plural form in the verse. On the impossibility of seeing, visualizing, imagining, describing, or even cogitating Allah, Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari narrated:
About the verse "Visions can not reach Him and He grasps all visions (6:103)", Imam al-Reza (AS) said: "O Aba Hashim! The thinking/imagination of the mind is more delicate than the vision of the eyes. By your imagination, you can reach to India and other places that you have not entered and your eyes have not reached. Thus, when the thinking of minds can not reach Him, then how could the visions of eyes do so?"
- al-Kafi, v1, p99, Hadith #11
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p113, Hadith #12
- Bihar al-Anwar, v4, p39, Hadith #17
Similarly, he narrated:
Imam al-Ridha (AS) said: "Verily the imagination of the mind is more (powerful) than the vision of the eyes. Thus (the verse means) minds can not reach Him, and He reaches to all minds."
- al-Kafi, v1, p98, Hadith #10
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p112, Hadith #11
- Bihar al-Anwar, v4, p39, Hadith #16
Sulaiman Ibn Khalid narrated:
Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said: "Avoid pondering over (the Essence of) Allah, because pondering over (the Essence of) Allah would only increase deviation/error. Verily Allah cannot be reached by the sight (of minds) and cannot be described by proportion."
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p457, Hadith #14
- Wasa'il al-Shia, v16, p197, Hadith #21334
- Bihar al-Anwar, v3, p259, Hadith #4
Moreover, it is narrated:
The Leader of the Faithful (AS) said: "Whosoever ponders on the Essence of Allah, becomes an infidel (Zindiq)."
- al-Kafi, v8, p22
- Tuhaf al-Uqul, p196
- Bihar al-Anwar, v74, p287
About the verse "Now there have come to you Visions (Basa'ir) from your Lord. Thus, he who become more insightful (Absara) it will be for (the good of) his own soul, and he who becomes blind, it will be to his own (harm) (6:104)", Abdullah Ibn Sanan narrated:

Explaining the verse, "Visions can not reach Him…", Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said: It is (more generally) about the grasping/encompassing/comprehending (of Allah) by the mind. Haven't you seen His saying 'now have come to you Visions (Basa'ir) from your Lord?' This does not mean the vision of the eyes. And (His saying) 'he who become more insightful (Absara) it will be for his own (benefit)', does not mean sight by eyes, and (His saying) 'and he who becomes blind, it will be to his own (harm)' does not mean blinding the eyes. Verily it means encompassing by mind just as we say a person is insightful (Basir) in poetry, and the other person is insightful (Basir) in Fiqh... Verily Allah is most exalted to be seen by eyes."
- al-Kafi, v1, p98, Hadith #9
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p112, Hadith #10
- al-Ihtijaj, v2, p336
- Bihar al-Anwar, v4, p33, Hadith#6

Seeing Allah is impossible when the mind cannot encompass Him. In another Hadith, Ibrahim al-Karkhi narrated:

I said to Ja'far Ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq (AS): "There is a man who claims to see Allah in dream. How is this possible?" He (AS) replied: "That man has no religion. Verily Allah can be seen neither in awareness, nor in dream, nor in this world, nor in the Hereafter."
- al-Amali, Shaikh Saduq, p610, Hadith #5
- Bihar al-Anwar, v4, p32, Hadith#7

Although the Hereafter may operate with different laws, there will be neither any change in the Essence of Allah, nor any change in the fact that everything other than Him is His creation and has no similarity to His Essence. That we cannot perceive Him will not change by our moving from this world to the Hereafter, as the Creator will not be limited by His creations, and His creations will not be able to violate the limits of the creation. If someone claims that he will be able to see his "god" in the hereafter by his eyes, it will mean that he will be able to bring his god to the level of creation. Either his eyes will catch the whole god, or he will see a part of his god. The former implies that his god is limited and the latter implies that his god has different parts and organs. Both cases are in contradiction with the Islamic belief that Allah, the Exalted, is Unlimited, and has no part or organ.

There is a very long but interesting Hadith from Imam Ali (AS) in our reliable sources from which I only quote those parts that are related to our topic. Abi Mu'ammar al-Sa'dani narrated:

A person came to Imam Ali (AS) and said: "I have become doubtful about the book of Allah as I have found some of its verses contradict others." (He then quoted some of the verses of Quran that he thought contradictory.) Imam Ali (AS) replied: "Verily in the Book of Allah each part confirms the other, and does not contradict one another, but you have not been granted the wisdom that benefits you... Avoid interpreting Quran by your opinion and you should obtain deep understanding of it from al-Ulamaa (i.e., the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt (AS)). Verily there exist many revealed verses whose wordings have similarity with the saying of humankind, but since they are the saying of Allah, their interpretation (Ta'wil) do not have any similarity with the (interpretation of the) saying of humankind. Nothing in His creation is like Him. Moreover, His action has no resemblance with any actions of any human, and also, His saying has no similarity with the saying of any human... Thus do not liken the saying of Allah to the saying of any human or else you will perish and will go astray. (Then Imam Ali (AS) explained to him the verses that he found contradictory among which are:)

In addition, His saying: 'Nor is hidden from thy Lord (so much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven (10:61)' proves nothing is hidden from our Lord. How could the creator of the things know not what He has created? And 'He is the (supreme) creator with (infinite) knowledge (36:81).' However, about His saying '(Allah) does not look (Nadhar) on them in the Day of Rising (3:77)' (which seems to be contradictory the previous verse) informs that He does not let any goodness reach them. When the Arabs say 'Fulan does not look upon us', they mean 'No goodness reaches to us on his side.' Thus, the 'Nadhar' (looking upon) from Allah to His creation is His Mercy for them. Also about the verse, 'Nay! Verily, that day they shall be veiled from their Lord (83:15)', it verily means that day they shall be veiled from the reward of their Lord.

As for His saying 'Do ye feel secure that He Who is in Heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up by the earth when it shakes (as in an earthquake)? (67:16)' and His saying 'And He is Allah in the heavens and on earth (6:3)' and His saying 'The (Commands and Plans of the) Most Gracious is established on the Throne (20:5)' and His saying '(He is) the Evident and the Hidden (57:3)' and 'And He is with you wheresoever ye may be (57:4)' and His saying 'We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein (50:16)' Such is Allah, increased is His Blessing and is the most High. He is purified and exalted that anything should happen to Him from whatever happens to the creations, and He is subtle, well-aware, the Most Glorious, and the Most High ... (Verily the above verses mean) He is witness to all secret conversations, and He has authority over all affairs, and He is illuminator of everything, and planner of all the things. He, the High, the Great, is much exalted to than be on His throne.

And about His saying: 'And thy Lord cometh, and His angels, rank upon rank (89:22)', and His saying: 'And now you have come to us alone as We created you for the first time (6:94)', and His saying: 'Will they wait (Yandhurun) until Allah comes to them in shades of clouds, with angels (2:210)' and His saying: 'Are they waiting to see if the angels come to them, or thy Lord comes, or certain of the Signs of thy Lord comes (6:158)', verily these are truth as Allah, the Mighty and the Majestic, said. However, the coming of Allah is not like the coming of His creation. You realized that there are many verses in Quran whose interpretations are different from their revealed appearance and are not similar to the saying of any human. I now inform you one aspect of (such a case) that will be sufficient for you, In-Shaa-Allah. It is regarding the saying of Ibrahim (mentioned in Quran:) 'I will go to my Lord! He will surely guide me! (37:99)' Ibrahim's 'going' to His Lord is his turning to worship and his striving in obedience to achieve proximity to Allah. Don't you see that its interpretation is other than (the appearance of) its revelation? Also Allah said: 'and We sent down Iron, in which is great might (57:25)' which means weapons and other similar things, and His saying: 'Are they waiting to see if the angels (of punishment) come to them' is because they did not acknowledged Allah and His Apostle (S.A.W.) 'or thy Lord comes, or certain of the Signs of thy Lord comes (6:158)' means the punishment (of Allah) comes to them in this world as He punished the ancient nations, and this is the news that the Prophet gave about them. Then Allah states: 'the day that certain Signs of thy Lord do come, no good will it do to a soul to believe in them if he believed not before or if he did not earn good (deeds) in his (state of) faith (6:158)' Here 'before' means before the coming of His sign, and the sign is rising of sun from the west. It is sufficient for the people of understanding to know this would happen when the veils are removed and 'when they see that which was promised (of punishment is fulfilled) (19:75; 72:24)' and in another verse: 'But Allah came to them in such a way that they did not expect (59:2)' means Allah sent them (unexpected) punishment. And such is the bringing of their structures by Allah, as He said: 'Thus Allah brought forth their structures from their foundations (16:26).' This means sending the punishment... Thus, content yourself with what I described for you instead of what has occupied your mind due to (misunderstanding of) what Allah has described in His Book, and do not consider His saying like the sayings of any human, as He is the Greatest, the Most Glorious, and is Higher than what the describers describe, except for that which He has described Himself in His saying: 'Nothing is like Him and He is who hears and sees (42:11).'

As for His saying: 'Nay, they deny the meeting (Liqaa) with their Lord (32:10)', meeting means resurrection and Allah has named it Liqaa (meeting/getting together). Such is when He mentions the believers: 'Those who bear in mind the certainty that they are to meet their Lord (2:46)', which means they are certain that they shall be resurrected, shall be gathered, shall be accounted, and shall be recompensed by reward or punishment. The word 'Dhann' here means certainty. The same goes for His saying: 'whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him do good (18:110)' and His saying: 'Those whose hopes are in the meeting with Allah (should know that) the term appointed by Allah is surely coming (29:5)', which means those who believe they shall be resurrected (should know that) verily the promise of Allah in terms of reward and punishment is coming. Thus, here Liqaa (meeting) does not mean "seeing"; rather, it means "rising". Therefore, know that in all places in the Book of Allah where Liqaa is used it means resurrection. Such is again the verse: 'Their salutation on the Day they

meet Him will be: Peace! (33:44)' It means the faith does not leave their hearts on the Day of Judgment."
The questioner said: "May Allah relieve you, O Commander of the Believers, as you relieved me. You, indeed, resolved my problem."
- Kitab al-Tawhid, pp 254-267, Hadith #5
- Bihar al-Anwar, v90/93, pp 127-140, Hadith #2

4 Seeing Allah by Heart
Unlike the mind and the eyes, the heart can 'see' Allah. Seeing Allah by heart is defined as recognizing Allah through His created signs such as His mercy, sovereignty, glory, etc. Once we recognize the signs of Allah in our heart and through our conscience, we have recognized Allah in our heart. This type of vision does not limit Allah since we do not perceive His Essence, and His Essence is not disclosed to us in any way. We only find in our conscience that, due to His signs, He is not non-existent and is not absent from us. Hisham narrated:
Mu'awiya Ibn Wahab asked Imam al-Sadiq (AS): "O son of the Apostle of Allah (S.A.W.)! What do you say about the narration that states 'the Apostle of Allah (S.A.W.) saw His Lord in anyway he saw', and the narration which states 'people in paradise shall see their Lord in Paradise in anyway they shall see.'" He (AS) replied: "Verily Muhammad (S.A.W.) did not see His Lord by the sight of his eyes. Verily seeing is of two types: seeing by eyes, and seeing by heart. Thus, (in the mentioned traditions) if one considers it seeing by heart, then it is correct. However, if one considers it seeing by eye, then he has certainly disbelieved in Allah and in His signs. This is because the Apostle of Allah (S.A.W.) said: 'He who likens Allah to His creations has indeed become a disbeliever.' Indeed, my father narrated me from his father from al-Husain Ibn Ali (AS) who said, the Commander of Believers (AS) was asked: 'Have you seen your Lord?' He (AS) said: 'How could I worship the one I do not see? Eyes can not see Him in an eye-witnessing process, but the hearts can see Him through the reality of faith.'" Then the Imam (AS) continued: "Any thing that the eye could reach is a created (being) and any created being needs a creator. Thus, (if one could see his Lord by his eye) the eye has made Him a created being, not eternal. He who likens Him to His creatures has indeed taken associates with Allah. Woe onto them! Haven't they heard that Allah said: 'Visions can not reach Him, and He reaches to all visions, and He is Subtle well-aware (of all things) (6:103)' and His saying: 'By no means canst thou see Me; But look upon the mount; if it abides in its place, then shalt thou see Me. When (the created light of) his Lord manifested to the Mount, He made it as dust (7:143)' Verily He revealed just an amount of His (created) light that could pass through the eye of a needle, which struck the mountain. 'And Moses fell down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses he said: Glory be to Thee! To Thee I turned' from the saying of he who thinks you can be seen, and returned to my understanding of you that the sight can not reach you 'and I am the first to believe (7:143)' means the first to confess that you see and you are not seen."
- Kifayatul Athar, p260
- al-Bihar, v4, p54, Hadith #32

5 Visiting Allah
The Ahlul-Bayt (AS) have also provided an in-depth interpretation regarding the topic of Visiting Allah. Here, I quote a number of traditions in this regard. In a very interesting tradition from Imam al-Ridha (AS), which is widely reported in our Hadith literature, Abu Salt (RA) narrated:
I asked Ali Ibn Musa al-Reza (AS): "O son of the Apostle of Allah! What do you say about that which is narrated by the people of Hadith that the believers will visit (Ziyarat) their Lord (Rabb) from their houses in Paradise?" He (AS) said: "O Aba Salt! Verily Allah gave His Prophet, Muhammad (S.A.W.), superiority/excellence over all His creatures from the Prophets to the Angels. He made/defined obedience to him as obedience to Him, pledging oath to him as pledging to Him, and visiting (Ziyarat) him in this world and in the Hereafter as visiting Him. Allah, the Mighty and the Majestic, said: 'Whoever obeys the Apostle, he has indeed obeyed Allah (4:80)' and 'Verily those who pledge allegiance to you, they have indeed pledged allegiance to Allah; the Hand of Allah is over their hands (48:10)'. And the Prophet (S.A.W.) said: 'He who visits (Ziyarat) me in my life or

after my death has indeed visited Allah.' In fact, the degree/level of the Prophet (S.A.W.) in the paradise is the highest (of all), and thus he who visits him in his degree from his house in Paradise has indeed visited Allah."

I further asked the Imam: "O son of the Apostle of Allah! What is the meaning of the Hadith that (people) narrate: 'The reward of saying, there is no God but Allah, is looking toward the face of Allah.'" The Imam (AS) replied: "He who attributes Allah a face like faces, has become a disbeliever. The face of Allah is His Prophets, His Apostles and His Proofs, peace be upon them, by whom people are attracted to Him and His religion and get to know Him. Allah, the Mighty and the Majestic, said: 'All that is over it shall perish, but shall remain the face of thy Lord, to Whom belong Majesty and Honor. (55:26-27)' Further Allah said: 'Everything shall perish but His face. (28:88)' Thus (the above Hadith means) looking toward the Apostles of Allah, His Prophets, and His Proofs in their degrees is a great reward for the believers in the Day of Judgment. And verily the Prophet (S.A.W.) said: 'He who hates my Ahlul-Bayt and my progeny, he shall not see me (i.e., shall not see my mercy) nor shall I see him (i.e., nor do I pay attention to him) on the Day of Judgment.' He (S.A.W.) also said: 'Verily amongst you are people who shall not see me after my departure.' O Aba Salt! Verily Allah cannot be described by place and cannot be captured by eyes or by thinking/imagination."

- al-Ihtijaj, v2, p408
- Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha, v1, p115, Hadith #3
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p117, Hadith #21
- al-Bihar, v4, p31, Hadith #6

We have numerous traditions stating that the Prophet (S.A.W.) and his Ahlul-Bayt (AS) are the "face" of Allah, His "eye", His "tongue", and His "hand", etc. Allah is exalted beyond having organs, as He is the creator of the face, eye, tongue and hand. Whatever is other than Allah falls into the category of His creation, including what is called the "face of Allah", and Allah does not need any of His creation. Anywhere in the Quran where these words have been used for Allah actually refer to the best creation of Allah, and does not refer to His Essence. In fact, it is narrated that Imam Ali (AS) unequivocally stated:

Imam Ali (AS) said: "Any verse in the Book of Allah where any of the words 'eye', 'face', 'hand', or 'side' is mentioned (for Allah) refers to al-Wali."

- Bihar al-Anwar, v25, p172

The word al-Wali means the friend of Allah who is authorized by Him over His creations. Thus, visiting Allah in this world and in the Day of Judgment is defined as seeing the face of Allah, that is, the light of Prophet Muhammad and his family, peace be upon them. The face is the means of identification. Thus, to know Allah, one should look at His face! This means that the proofs of Allah were the means of attraction towards Allah, and only through them, one could properly recognize Him. The meaning of the word "al-Hujja" (the Proof of Allah) refers to the same fact.

The verse 28:88 of Quran that was mentioned in the Hadith of Imam al-Ridha (AS), "Everything shall perish but His face", does not prove eternity for the face of Allah. It rather gives evidence to the fact that the role of the Proofs of Allah does not come to end by the death of their bodies. In the commentary of the above verse, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said:

"It means everything shall perish but His religion. The Apostle of Allah (S.A.W.) and the Commander of Believers (AS) were His religion and His face, and His eye amongst His servants, and His tongue by which He spoke, and His hand over His creatures. And we are the face of Allah by which (people) are turned/directed toward Allah. We are always present to His servants so long as Allah wishes to keep them, and afterwards Allah shall take us towards Himself and shall do with us what He pleases."

- Kitab al-Tawhid, p151, Hadith #7
- al-Bihar, v4, p7, Hadith #14

The fact that the light of Prophet Muhammad and his family (peace be upon them all) was the first creation of Allah is even acknowledged by the Sunnis. Of the traditions they have narrated in this regard is the following Hadith on the authority of Salman al-Farsi (RA) who said:

I heard the Apostle of Allah (S.A.W.) saying: "I and Ali were one light in the hands of Allah fourteen thousand years (14,000) before He created Adam (AS). When Allah created Adam (AS) He divided that light into two parts, I being one part and Ali being the other."
Sunni References:
- Mizan al-I'tidal, by al-Dhahabi, v1, p235
- Fadha'il al-Sahaba, by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v2, p663, Tradition #1130
- al-Riyadh al-Nadhira, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, v2, p164, v3, p154
- History of Ibn Asakir
As mentioned in the previous section, seeing Allah by the heart means recognition/identification (Ma'rifa) of Allah through the heart. Now, according to the following traditions, the recognition of Allah is defined as the recognition of the light of Prophet Muhammad and his Ahlul-Bayt, peace be upon them. Salman al-Farsi (RA) and Abu Dhar (RA) both narrated:
The Leader of the Faithful (AS) said: "Certainly, no one's faith becomes complete until he knows me by the recognition of my light. Once he knows me by such recognition (Ma'rifat), his heart has passed Allah's test for (perfect) faith and Allah has opened his bosom for submission and has become cognizant (Arif) with vision. He who falls short of such recognition will (remain) doubtful. O Salman! O Jundab! Recognition (Ma'rifat) of my light is recognition of Allah (SWT), and recognition of Allah (SWT) is recognition of my light."
- Bihar al-Anwar, v26, p1, Hadith #1
Note that, the light of Allah is His creation. However, since we have no way to understand the Essence of Allah, and that the recognition of His Essence can only be purifying Him from anything that we understand, Allah has "defined" His recognition as the recognition of His greatest sign, that is the recognition of His light. This is as much as we can observe, and we are not able to see beyond this created light. This light, the first creation of Allah, is the light of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and his Ahlul-Bayt (AS). A person who reaches to this light has reached to the climax of understanding Allah since he has recognized His greatest sign. Imam Hasan al-Askari (AS) said:
Imam al-Reza (AS) said: "Allah is known/recognized by the signs and is proven by the indications."
- Tafsir Imam Hasan al-Askari (AS), p50, Hadith #24
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p47, Hadith #9
- Bihar al-Anwar, v4, p303, Hadith #31
The greater the sign, the greater the recognition. A person who has recognized the greatest sign of Allah (i.e., the light of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and his Ahlul-Bayt (AS)), has attained the greatest recognition (Ma'rifat) of Allah. Muhammad Ibn Muslim narrated:
Imam al-Baqir (AS) said: "Avoid pondering on (the Essence of) Allah. However, when you intend to look towards His majesty, then look towards His greatest creation."
- al-Kafi, v1, p93, Hadith #7
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p457, Hadith #14
- Wasa'il al-Shia, v16, p195, Hadith #21327
Moreover, Salama Ibn Ataa narrated:
Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said: al-Husain Ibn Ali (AS) said: "O People! Certainly Allah, the Glorious, created the servants so that they recognize/know Him, and when they recognize Him they serve/worship Him, and when they worship Him they will have no need to worship other than Him." At this time someone asked: "May my father and my mother be sacrificed for you, O Son of the Apostle of Allah! What is the recognition (Ma'rifat) of Allah?" He (AS) replied: "The recognition of the Imam of the time whose obedience is obligatory to People."
- Ilal al-Sharaye', part 1, p9, Hadith #1
- Kanz al-Fawa'id, v1, p328,
- Bihar al-Anwar, v23, p83, Hadith #22
- Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalain, under Verse 51:56
In another Hadith, Abi Basir narrated:
Imam al-Sadiq (AS) said: The Commander of Believers said: "I am the Guide, and the Guided, ... I am the leader of Believers towards Paradise. I am the Strong Rope of Allah, the trustworthiest

handhold, and the word of Taqwa. I am the eye of Allah, His truthful tongue, and His hand. I am the side of Allah about whom (Allah) sates: 'Lest the soul should (then) say: 'Ah! Woe onto me that I neglected (my duty towards)/abandoned/abused the side of Allah (39:56).' I am the outstretched hand of Allah in Mercy over His creation, and I am the door of forgiveness. Whoever recognizes me and recognizes my rights has indeed recognized His Lord, because I am the Wasi of His Prophet on His Earth and His Proof over His creation. No one would deny this but he who has denied Allah and His Apostle."
- al-Ikhtisas, p248
- Kitab al-Tawhid, p164, Hadith #2
- Ma'ani al-Akhbar, p17, Hadith #14
- Bihar al-Anwar, v24, p198, Hadith #27

When something is very close to a person it will be on his side. Imam Ali is called the 'side' of Allah as he has become 'close' to Him through obedience so much so that neglecting his right would mean neglecting Allah's right, forsaking him would mean forsaking Allah, and recognizing him in heart would mean recognizing Allah in heart.

Moreover, they being the "eye" of Allah mean that the light of Prophet (S.A.W.) and his family are witness to mankind. Nonetheless, this does not mean Allah is in need of them for watching over the creation. Allah has full knowledge and is witness over all His creation. This rather means Allah has chosen them to be also witnesses to their acts much the same as He has chosen some angels to be witnesses over each and every action of the human being.

Similarly, they being the "tongue" of Allah clearly means that Allah speaks to mankind through them. They inform them of His orders and His commandments, explain His message, and protect His religion.

As for them being the outstretched "hand" of Allah in mercy, shows that the mercy of Allah reaches to His creation only through them. The hand can also refer to power. Allah shows His power through them. Certainly, Allah does not need anyone to work for Him; however, His glory is exalted to do simple jobs in person. He has created some servants and angels and has assigned them different duties, while He has full control above them. Moreover, He attributed their acts to Himself, as He has ordered them of those acts and He knows that they exactly follow His commandments.

Those who have denied the virtues of Ahlul-Bayt (AS), could not explain the above-mentioned verses of Quran any other way except that they considered Allah as having a body complete with organs such as a face, hands, eyes, sides, etc. The essence of such a god can surely be seen. They have limited Allah to their faculties, and by claiming to see the Essence of Allah through their eyes, they have fallen into a clear kind of polytheism (Shirk).

May Allah grant us knowledge and Taqwa, save us from the Fitna of Satan, the accursed. May Allah hasten the advent of our Imam (AS), and quench our thirst through his knowledge and his company.